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By STEVE LOPEZ

Two theories that backfired

It's not often that I do this, but today I would like to thank all the alert readers who called or wrote to make trenchant comments on a couple of recent columns.

Many of these have begun something like this: "You idiot, do you have any idea what you're doing?"

But not all of them were so nice.

The columns that upset them were about U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter of Philadelphia, and his memorable work on JFK and Anita Hill. And I have to admit, they were not very flattering columns. In the last one, I quoted a woman who called Arlen an oily, beady-eyed barracuda.

But of the people who complained, not a single one of them came to Specter's defense. In fact, they agreed with the columns. They were just worried that if I keep roasting Specter for his magic bullets and delusional lying women, it can only help his opponent in the coming election.

That would be State Rep. Stephen Freind of Delaware County.

And I must admit, they have a point.

Freind fliers

Not that I want to sit here and make judgments about which of these two Republicans would be the worse man for the job. I just agree that it's probably only fair to balance the coverage a bit.

Especially since Freind staffers have been hanging out on street corners late at night, much like prostitutes, handing "Steve Freind for U.S. Senate" fliers to people leaving the movie *JFK*.

Actually, though the image is kind of nice, a closer analogy would be personal-injury attorneys handing out business cards at six-car pileups. In the movie, Specter is neatly made to look like a buffoon for his magic bullet theory.

Looking at Freind's flier, which is almost as empty as Specter's op-ed article defending his work for the Warren Commission, I couldn't help but remember one of Freind's pet theories. And the strange thing is, you could almost call it Freind's very own magic bullet theory.

Rape victims

Freind is the guy who told us that it was virtually impossible for a woman who is raped to get pregnant. Nobody made a movie about Freind's theory, as far as I know, but I didn't see *Steel Magnolias*.

Anyhow, Freind used the magic bullet theory as part of his argument, in 1988, against abortions for rape victims. The way it works, he said, is that the trauma of rape causes women to secrete sperm-killing agents. Or, in a manner of speaking, magic bullets.

Because the idea was somewhat difficult for me to fathom, I actually got out a pencil and a scratch pad, and graphically sketched a likely course for Freind's relentless, zigzagging, sperm-killing agents.

Upon completion, much to my surprise, my artwork looked almost exactly like Arlen Specter's rendering of the JFK assassination.

And when I turned it upside down, I saw Fidel Castro.

But back to Freind's theory, the question, of course, is whether three bullets would be sufficient to kill the sperm, or whether you would need between four and six bullets fired from more than one location.

No apologies

Another possible question is whether Freind, when he came up with his theory, had a condom pulled down over his head.

Myself, I believed in Freind, and even suggested at the time that he patent those magic bullets as a contraceptive. Maybe call it *Freinds for Life*. But others were cruel, and in much the same way that Specter has been ridiculed lately for his magic bullet theory, Freind became a national laughingstock for his magic sperm-killer theory.

Under pressure, he promised to produce medical evidence. A month later, he took a step back, but didn't exactly surrender.

"No apologies whatsoever are called for here," Freind said confidently, explaining that his basic theory was accurate despite some "imprecise" language.

Basing his theory in part on a World War II Nazi study, he said he had exaggerated in saying only one rape victim "in millions and millions and millions" gets pregnant. But he still insisted "it is incredibly rare" for rape victims to become pregnant.

Having established himself as the state legislature's foremost expert on body fluids, Freind explained:

"It's not the presence of the secretion that kills the sperm. It's the lack of those secretions . . . that don't do their work and trigger the hormones that bring about the ovulation."

In other words, the magic bullets are blanks, but still do the job.

If details can be worked out, Freind and Specter will be appearing nightly at the Franklin Institute Science Museum. Until then, both are available for private parties.